# The Tragic Fate in Chiller's Later Dramas

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The ancient Greeks saw that there was no stability in the heavens above or in the earth below, that ruin followed success and disaster trod upon the heels of prosperity. This he observed and his simple, child-like mind fancied at first thought that there was some blind, inscrutable power that fastened itself upon the unoffending victim and drew it down to inevitable destruction; a power capricious, malicious,-- dread. But harmony was the first prime attribute of Greek intellectuality, and it was only a question of time for such a chaotic irresponsibility to be eliminated from his mental horizon. The scope of his intellect gradually broadened. The disjointed facts of observation and experience arranged themselves in some inherant or apparent order and then there seemed to exist for man according to his nature, state and life, certain limitations of prosperity, knowledge, happiness and power, which when overstepped, brought down upon the transgressor the wrath of the gods and inevitable ruin.

This idea, however, was developed very slowly from the obscurity of the primitive conception and Herodotus expressed it in nearly all its original vagueness when he says: "The divinity, having given a taste of the sweetness of life, is found afterward to be envious of that happiness."

Solon says to Croesus:- that the divinity is always jealous and that time constrains men to see and suffer many things that

they would not willingly see and suffer: But a divinity that would ruin man from mere caprice and malice could not represent a very lofty ideal; could not remain a permanent type in an aspiring civilization. Amasis stands on more advanced ground when he says to his friend, Polycrates: "Your too great good fortune does not please me, knowing as I do, that the divinity is jealous. I cannot remember that I ever heard of any man, who, having been continually successful, did not utterly perish." It is the excess of good fortune that is here deprecated as being endangered by a jealous divinity that strikes down every head as it emerges from the low mortal level. But is a jealousy at human success a sentiment worthy of the immortal gods? Here the Greek mind took a new departure, another step forward. Excess of prosperity, power, wisdom, or happiness induces pride, and over-weening pride is indeed justly offensive to the immortal gods, who jealous of their own glory, crush out pride, abase high thought and bring the creature of a day to a sense of his nothingness and his low estate.

Here we have the developement of the idea. First a crude notion of some hidden destructive agency, blind, inevitable, irresistable; then recognized as not absolutely blind, but destructive to all excess of prosperity, and lastly it is not the mere excess of prosperity it punishes but the over-weening pride thereby engendered is visited sometimes even upon the latest descendants.

Besides this there was another agency of kindred nature, visiting upon the heads of men the vials of unsparing wrath commensurate to the magnitude of their sins; an agency personified in the Erynnies. This latter agency is so well known and comes so near representing the Christian idea of divine retribution that it is perhaps not necessary to discuss it any further, beyond pointing out the difference between the Erynnies and the other more subtle agency described first; the Erynnies visiting their wrath mostly on the open crimes, the sinful actions of men, and the other apportioning retribution for all secret sins, the sins of the heart and mind. As a good example of the function of the Erynnies we have the "Oresteia", where they follow with unsparing wrath the footsteps of the transgressor, and debarred of rest or respite the guilty soul is relentlessly hunted to the very bounds of the earth.

A fine representation of the other agency we find in the Persians. Xerxes has committed no heinous crime but-

"Proud thoughts were never made for mortal man;
A haughty spirit blossoming bears a crop
Of woe and reaps a harvest of despair.
Jove is the chastiser of high vaunting thoughts
And heavily falls his judgment on the proud."

Man in his pride and in the glory of his prosperity may think himself above danger and disaster-

" But when the gods deceive,
Wiles which immortals weave
Who shall beware?
Who when their nets surround
Breaks with a nimble bound
Out of their snare?

Therefore-

"Let no man in his scorn of present fortune
And thirst for other, mar his good estate;
Zens is the avenger of over lofty thoughts
A strict investigator."

These two agencies were the natural motive factors in Greek tragic art, from which examples like the preceding could be multiplied ad in finitum.

But in the course of the ages these ideas have passed through the vicissitudes of all things human according to the common law of mutation, the form changes and the name is lost, but the truth embodied in the principle remains intact. We find it employed in Shakespeare and other modern writers but it remained for Lessing to set it forth as it has come down to us altered by modern thought and influences. In its present form it is merely a modification and abstraction of the Christian idea of an inevitable Justice that brings to light and punishes all secret crimes, all violations of those unwritten moral laws pervading the world and

immanent in life, meeting out balanced retribution either in this world or the next. Only in tragedy there is this difference that it concerns itself, not with the next world but this, of which it takes one small fragment and works it into a complete and symmetrical whole. The idea of tragedy then is a hero worthy of our sympathy, who from some human weakness commits a violation of the higher moral law, which being of sufficient gravity in its natural course of consequences, draws him down to ruin, be this violation whatever it may, either in thought, word, or deed.

This is the tragic principle all in a nut shell, and where this is lacking there is no tragedy, perhaps a good comedy, a good drama, but no tragedy. Yet while all indications point out that the growth of the idea was something like it has been told, the Greek dramatists individually did not confine themselves strictly to any one of the phases mentioned, but they allowed themselves more or less latitude in selecting their motives. We find the same license in Schiller, especially in his latter and more important works where he makes a conscious use of this idea.

In Wallenstein we have one of the loftiest conceptions the human mind has ever produced. In the first place it is his excess of power and good fortune that is fatal to him. Power and fortune have made him reckless; but power and fortune alone produce enimies, and his recklessness increased their number. It is his power that sets in motion a host of influences to urge him on.

There is in the first place the court imperial.

Er ist ihnen zo hoch gestiegen,

Mochten iju gern herunter Kriegen.

He knows that and so does his army. There superstition comes in.

Denn das weiss ja die gauze welt

Dass der Freidlander einen Teufel

Ans der holle im solde halt.

Vague surmises of his future plans among his own soldiers, and, the discontent at the preferment of certain regiments, and the blatant opposition of the Capuchin protected by the Croats. To the General it seems a concordant and insoluble body surrendered unconditionally to their master's command, but to us, disinterested spectators appear a host of hidden plans and weaknesses that may succumb to any unfortunate strain.

"Fate is iron power, terribly ensnaring the man that first incites that power, rebounding on those that served it and annihilating all that approaches them, that is the theme of Wallenstein," according to Luvere; That is the truth but not the whole truth. Hofmeister perhaps descries it dimly when he claims to see in Wallenstein a duality, a division of the poetic conception. There is a division, a duality, a complexity rather, but not in the poetic conception.

"Fate overpowers the hero as the serpents overcome Laocoon", says Grim, and that idea seems to be the narrow sense of all the

broad critiques writen on the subject. But let us quote Winckelmann on this subject: Laocoon is nature....-- under the features of a man who seeks to gather up against pain (fate) all the strength of which his mind is concious.... there is an expression of indignation that seems to protest against an undeserved suffering." But vain is human opposition to a super-human power, he succumbs, blameless and calm, in all the grandeur of self-concious manhood. Schiller could have made him such had he wanted to, and it would have been a modernized representation of the Sophoclean idea of Electra, a play in which the interest would be concentrated on the pathetic element ( as defined by Schiller in his essay), a play in which admiration for the moral grandeur of the man in meeting his fate, would make us forget or overlook the harshness and cruelty of that fate in overwhelming him, a fine play but no tragedy. We would see him meet his doom with all the lawful means at his disposal but finding them of no avail, do as Max advises him to do, withdraw before he has compromised right and honor.

Yielding in this manner to the inevitable necessity, the comparison with Laocoon would be more justified, and the fate subduing him, would be more after the original Greek idea. But this is just what Wallenstein does not do. He sees it coming and instead of meeting it openly and manfully, he employs artifice. In secret he corresponds, has been corresponding with the Swedes for several years. He may not mean any harm, but appearances are

against him, and it is man's sacred duty to guard even against appearances, and besides he that toys with an adder must expect to be bitten. A man of true military honor would spurn with supreme contempt anything and everything that would throw upon his loyalty the slightest tinge of suspicion and if Wallenstein engages in a correspondence which must seem treasonable in the highest degree to any disinterested observer, it proves that if he is not a traitor in deed and intention, he is at least half a traitor at heart. It must be remembered that Wallenstein is a military hero and as such, to a certain extent at least, his actions must be judged from a military point of honor, and that will render his fate far more intelligible. To this he adds the far more flagrant offence of a proposed conjunction with the Swedes, and whatever his intentions were in this matter, even if he meant ultimately to save the country and expel the enemy, it was unmitigated treason and open rebellion against his emperor, his liege lord, conceived with the prime object of advancing his own personal ambitious interests. Then all along he shows a surprising lack of principle and scrupulousness, so far instance, his apathy towards the manner in which the signatures of the generals, are obtained.

His treatment of Max is another incriminating circumstance. The extent to which Wallenstein is complicated in this episode is not very clearly defined, but there are strong indications that he speciously favors and employs Max's affection for Thekla, to make

himself sure of the Picolomini. Another and most severely aggravating circumstance is the deceit practiced upon Butler. This too is left somewhat uncertain. We do not know whether the letter Octavio gives to Butler is genuine or not, but as long as nothing is said to the contrary, we are constrained to accept it as such. Some remarks made afterwards are perhaps not an admission of this deceit, yet the fact that he suspects Butler is half an admission, for it is human nature to be suspicious of those whom we feel we have wronged and therefore have reason to be revenged on us.

Recapitulating we have this:- the excess of power and prosperity, inducing pride and recklessness is the agency effecting his political downfall, in trying to oppose which, he makes use of improper means, and becomes entangled in a net work of guilt that finally causes his tragic fate. But here enters a question of subjective nature and here is where the critics have failed in applying a subjective test to an objective matter. Is the guilt that involves him sufficient to warrant his tragic fate if we consider it from our individual and from a general standpoints? Some critics have answered, No. But when we consider him from the standpoint of his own times and profession, as the poet undoubtedly intended, his fate is perfectly just and well earned.

In Maria Stuart we find the same complexity of fate, though otherwise there is but little resemblance. But brfore proceeding I want to deprecate the specious sophistry of certain critics, who

claim to see in the two heroines, the personifications of the opposing principles of Catholicism and Protestantism and imagine that therein lies the key to the issue of the play. Such iridescent mystification agrees well with the impotent hairsplitting of puny criticasters as in periods of general literary sterility shallow commentators have amused themselves with futile efforts to symbolize the products of preceeding ages literary activity; and the poet who would write with that end in view, might produce wooden puppets but no true men and women, transfused with the life-blood of realistic vitality. Such displays of subtlety are severely out of place on the subject of Maria Stuart, as well as on the rest of Schiller's plays.

The chief difference between Wallenstein and Maria Stuart is that the former begins at the beginning and the latter begins almost at the end. In Wallenstein we have the whole chain of circumstances that led to his downfall, in Maria Stuart we meet the heroine already in the power of fate and it is only a question of time or chance when those iron jaws, shall close on her devoted head. Wallenstein's path to guilt is success, pride, recklessness; Maria's has been beauty, pride, recklessness in strict analogy.

In strictly analogous courses their respective fortunes tread and only in the immediate causes of the issue is there any dissimilarity. Wallenstein's guilt is not so clearly set forth, yet it is the direct cause of his death: Maria Stuart has failed and

repents it bitterly, yet she is innocent of the crime laid at her door and for which she is finally condemned. We meet Maria in the attitude pathetically human of a truly repentant sinner sorrowing in the immediate shadow of a portentous Nemesis and our interest and sympathy are completely enlisted in her behalf.

"Bleeding anew the long atoned crime
Both from the lightly sodded grave arise.
A murdered husband's vengeance haunting shade
No bell of ministrant, no sacred host
In priestly hand, can banish to its tomb."

"So tender yet I drew,
This heavy guilt upon my youthful head,
With blood the bloody deed:- that did but avenge
And bloodily,
I fear too soon 'twill be avenged on me."

These are the keynotes of that attitude which makes us tremble for we are constrained to acknowledge the justice of these presentiments while at the same time her sincere repentance makes us sympathize with her and wish to see her saved. With increasing interest we watch the developement of the play and when the interview is to take place we are filled with disquieting apprehensions for the issue, nor are they ungrounded. Maria's beauty and pride, Elizabeth's jealousy, may well cause us to expect a fatal collision, and our expectations are fully realized.

It is Maria's beauty that makes Elizabeth jealous and causes her to assume a harsh, ungraceful attitude, thereby offending Maria's pride which bursts all bounds when scornfylly reproached of her crime, thus precipitating her own destruction. This is the turning point of her destiny and the motive agencies here, are her beauty and her pride, directly, and her crime, indirectly, through Elizabeth's reproaches.

Fate has fulfilled its prime requisite, that of being just even though severe. After this the pathetic element, strong from the very beginning, becomes more and more dominant. Maria subdues her pride, is reconciled to her fate, and meets her doom with lofty composure, with heroic fortitude. By the introduction of these elements she becomes almost a martyr in our eyes and the death of a martyr is not the occasion of sorrow but of triumph.

This appeal from the reason on which depends mostly, the interpretation of fate, to the sympathies of the human heart, is one of the master strokes of dramatic art. Without it the issue would have seemed cold and harsh despite its justice.

In the Maid of Orleans, the fate is of a different nature, being founded entirely on the modern idea. Success and pride may enter as factors into the cause of her distraction, but if so, only subordinate and not to be easily detected. Providence has chosen her for a special mission and she has accepted this mission upon the special conditions assigned. There is nothing strange or unnatural about this. Every station in life imposes upon the occupant particular duties 

and limitations. Joan's mission is extraordinary and likewise are the accompanying conditions, which is no more than reasonable and it is necessary to accept these conditions as just or condemn the play entirely.

"A maiden pure and chaste
Achieves whate'er on earth is glorious,
If earthly love she bravely doth withstand."

It is somewhat doubtful whether this earthly love is to be taken in its broader sense, any attachment to things of this earth whatever, or in the narrower sense of amorous affection; but probably the former is meant.

"A sightless instrument doth God demand,
With blinded eyes performing his behest."

This is almost in the nature of an axiom and it serves as a compliment to the preceeding. The conditions thus imposed she violates, which all concede, but the point in dispute is whether she is responsible for this violation, or whether it is a heaven-sent temptation entirely beyond her control. This latter opinion is held by many critics and that her love for Livuel is sudden and unfounded, and thinking that, up to this she has been in perfect peace and harmony with herself, they are not aware that this is only the culmination, the climax of a series of struggles and failings that have obscured her soul and set her at war with herself and her mission. She is the inspired prophetess, impervious to charms of earthly vanities. The soul con-centred on its only

object is capable of everything and soars above the narrow limits of reality. But the life of court and camp with all its splendor and renown taint even her unspotted character. She becomes ambitious, and proud too perhaps.

" Thy destiny in thine own bosom lies," she says to Agnes. It sounds almost prophetic of herself. Her mission is to relieve Orleans and lead the king to Rheims to be crowned. But boastfully she makes it her ambitious purpose to drive the British entirely out of France. The episode with Montgomery also points to some distraction of her soul. People do not stop to argue questions that do not exist for them, nor is it natural for one fully persuaded of having a divine mission to fulfill, to waste the precious moments in vacillation and desultoriness.

" From happy haunts of childhood snatched away
From love of father and of sisters fond,
Here must I, must, for God's dread voice commands
Not mine own choice, a dread to you nor joy
To me, a phantom dire, destructive go
To scatter death and fall his prey at last."

These words, spoken to Montgomery constitute a very significant confession. Here she exhibits other thoughts than those concerning her mission, and the fact becomes apparent that she no longer despises the glories of this earth. We are therefore surprised at her grateful acceptance of the honor the king bestows or that he should wish to have it completed by an honorable matrimonial

alliance. Her silence, showing the impression made, her blushing confusion and flash of temper, when the matter is urged too far, are strong indications that a kindred chord is touched in her soul. For the enlightened prophetess such things were not to exist; and that which does not exist for us, which is beneath our care and consideration, does not and cannot affect us. As an emissary of the divinity she must do her mission dispassionately, as a duty, destroying her enemies though in true Christian spirit grieving at the necessity; but instead she becomes possessed of a fiery thirst for blood and an insatiable hatred. She becomes a mere earthly warrior maiden and as such she is open to all temptations. She falls in love with Livuel, rather suddenly it is true, but not unnaturally so, especially when we consider that she is strongly prompted by her peculiar mental mood, and thereby repudiates her mission and breaks her vows. The fact that she did not clear herself of the charges made against her by her father is severely denounced by certain critics but they only show their own ignorance of human nature. To say the right thing at the right time only happens once in a while, and besides, confused, and depressed by a consciousness of her guilt, her state of mind is such as to make clear and concise thought almost a physical impossibility, and the manner of putting the questions greatly aggravates the difficulty and increases her confusion. The episode with the black knight brings out forcibly this tarnishment of her character.

The angel voice of divination has deserted her, and naught is left but a vague, human presentiment. But there is also a psychological necessity of her loss of power. As long as her soul is centered on its mission she is invincible, but when things of this earth begin to distract her, when finally the all absorbing passion of love influences her soul, her power is lost, she is nothing but a woman weak and frail. But she overcomes her weakness, repents of her failings and her power comes back to her. Her death, which seems the result of her sin, a sort of temporal punishment after forgivenness has been obtained, gives the poet a welcome means of ending her career and thereby also the play, while its nature is such as to debar all bitter feelings and leave us rather in a state of poetic triumph and heroic exultation.

In the Bride of Messina the first "motive" is the ancient idea of a curse laden fate transmitted to ~~regal~~ posterity. Yet while this hovers over the house like a phantom of gloom, the immediate cause of the tragic issue is found in the actions of the dramatis personae themselves. The question now arises whether the guilt contained in these actions is of such a nature as to warrant that issue, and here is where the critics disagree; some refusing entirely to see anything blameworthy therein and hinge the outcome solely on the ancient idea of fate; yet the guilt incurred is such as we all know has brought countless victims to ruin.

The rebellious struggle against the decrees of Providence; the secrecy and pride on the part of Isabella, the peculiar character of the two brothers, generating passions not subjected to proper control, and the rashness of Beatrice, these are the factors that condition the issue. It is true in life, persons of greater guilt and less noble character often enjoy immunity from any disastrous consequences, yet that is by no means the rule. If such an issue may seem somewhat severe in the drama, it is no less so in life and if the poet has been true to life and true to the workings of divine justice, he has done all that can be asked of him.

It was not Schiller's intention to unravel the Gordian knot of divine justice and compensation to the satisfaction of the super sentimental hypercrities of this later age, but to cast the flash lights of realistic splendor upon the clouds folds that envelope human destiny and indicate a superior Power ruling sublime above all human purpose.

Tell, not being a tragedy really, the idea of fate does not enter except perhaps in a negative way. Gessler is indeed the victim of a well-deserved fate. But the play is Tell not Gessler who is no more to us than a mere brute and if it is the fate and destiny of brutes to be slaughtered, that is nothing to us, it does not affect us. Tell has led a life of devotion to right and duty, has committed no trespass of those moral laws that circumscribe the existance of man, and therefore fate's envious hand has

no power over him. He may be accused of pride but is a manly, patriotic pride commendable in the highest degree and without which man becomes despicable. Not having offended, Tell has nothing to fear, though fate may threaten, dangers gather and wrong seem to triumph, his cause is just and must eventually prevail.

Dimitrins is a counterpart to the Maid, minus the supernatural element and repentance, and stronger in the psychologic element. Dimitrins believes fully in the justness of his cause and his course is success while he does, but as soon as he finds himself in the wrong, he becomes at war with himself and pursues a course that results in his ruin. Here we have the modern idea of fate very strikingly exemplified, without anything of the ancient idea.

These dramas do not exhibit any marked line of developement of this idea but the poet has evidently employed such phases of it as seemed appropriate to the different subjects. The introduction of a psychological necessity in the Maid is noteworthy as a new departure, which he takes up again in Dimitrins. It is also interesting to note that the plays may be grouped in pairs. In Wallenstein and Mary Stuart the motives are very similar as has been pointed out. Likewise in the Maid and in Dimitrins; while the Bride and Tell go together as extremes, the one representing the blindest and most inscrutable fate of all of Schiller's plays and the other repudiating that idea entirely.